

THE EFFECTS OF GROWING UP AND
AGING OUT OF THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM
ON POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

By

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ON POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

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Abstract: This study seeks to take a more in depth look at the role parents play in socializing their children to political activity. To get a better understanding of parent's role I looked at adults who grew up and aged out of the foster care system. Knowing that children who live in the foster care system experience a variety of parents based on education, income, and race. People who live in the foster care system can experience a multitude of different homes throughout their lifetime. Using already established political measurements, such as, education and income I hoped to find a better understanding between political participation and parental socialization. Using Facebook, I administered a survey to ask about each individual experience during their time in the system. This group is one of the most understudied groups in politics so looking at their life experiences can help us to gain better insight into how to fix this broken system.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Beginning in the 1950's various scholars became drawn to understanding the influence of early political socialization (Neundorf and Smets 2017). The earliest known definition that political scientist have for political socialization comes from Hyman (1959), he defined political socialization as an individual's "learning of societal patterns corresponding to his societal position as mediated through various agencies of society". This gave political scientist a broad range of influences that could affect each individual's political participation. Religion, education, race, etc. are all influences that researchers have found to effect whether or not a person will likely become politically active. One factor, that is believed to be one of the biggest influencers, is early parental socialization. In 1965, James Davies, found that one's father is the classic example of an authority figure and thereby initiates a child into the world of politics. Knowing the importance that parents play in helping their child develop strong political ideas; what happens to the child who does not grow up with stable parents? Or the child who does not maintain the same parents throughout their lifetime?

Children who live in the foster care system, regardless of their age, race, or gender are likely to live in multiple homes during their lifetime. Foster care is defined as (also known as out-of-home care) is a temporary service provided by States for children

who cannot live with their families (Stone 2014). Children are usually pulled from their homes because their biological parents cannot provide proper care for them or they are being abused. The lack of research into this group leaves a hole in the literature. If we want to truly see the role ones' parents play in their political development, then looking at children who do not have a consistent set of parents may be the place to start.

Political scientist have studied the effects of parental socialization on a child's voting habits. Using twin studies to understand the role genetics play in ones voting probability (see literature review) and survey studies to understand the role one's parents have in helping them build a strong understanding of the importance of political participation. However, a gap that I have discovered in the literature finds a group of underrepresented individuals that we may not have considered when we study parental socialization. Research into the effects of foster care and the influence that it has on voting habits has not been studied. While there has been research on the influence of education, income, and parental influence on non-foster care children, there has not been any research done into the effects that foster care has on the political participation of the children that age out of the system. This research could help others understand more of the implications that foster care has on children. If we can begin to understand the impact that foster care has on not only the mental and physical health of these children, but also political impact, we may be able to change the system. If more foster kids began to vote and understand politics, then they could hopefully help to make a change. These kids have first-hand experience of what the system is like and how it could be better. This

research could help these children understand the importance of voting, as well as influence foster parents to help the children in their care by fostering a healthy understand of politics and its importance in each individual's life.

Research Question: What effects does growing up in the foster care system have on young adult political participation?

Literature Review

In order to better understand the relationship between parental socialization and its influence on political participation, we need to examine the relationship between foster care and voter participation. Parental education, sex, and income are all influencers that help to determine whether a child will be politically active or not. The higher a parent's socioeconomic status: education and income level the more likely their child is to be politically active. Children are also more likely to follow the political habits, specifically voting, of the parent of their same sex. Below, I will discuss these factors more in depth. Plenty of research exist to tell us what kind of influence parents can have on their child's political participation but little to no research has been done to discover a link between children who lack a stable home life and those who have parents who are consistently present in their lives. Some research has been done to understand the role that adoptive parents play in socializing their children to politics (Grotevant et al. (2000), Vonk, Lee, and Crolley-Simic (2010), Scroggs and Heitfield (2001), (Vonk and Massatti 2007).

This is especially true in biracial and transracial adoptions. Adopted children rely on their parents to help them understand racial politics. The way in which parents choose to express political views to them will affect the way that each child understand politics based on their own story. It is difficult for adopted children to build their own identity that is different from the identity given to them by their families when they have been adopted. This varies based on age of adoptee and the racial dynamics that make up each family.

Basic Voting Literature

In the United States, voting is one of the most basic rights guaranteed to each individual. However, not everyone in the US takes advantage of this right many studies have been done to understand what Americans are more likely to vote and why. Below, I will discuss two different factors that influence whether or not an American will vote: socioeconomic status and education.

Research has shown that lower income voters usually do not vote as often as those with higher income do. Russel gives three reasons that people who have higher income are more likely to vote: 1. Individuals who have higher income are better at the actual participation of voting; this includes driving to the polling place, deciding who to vote for, etc., 2. Voting is very similar to normal activities pursued by higher income individuals daily, and 3. High income jobs tend to be less labor intensive than lower income occupations (Russell 113). Economic inequality powerfully depresses political interest, political discussion, and participation in elections in all but the most affluent

Americans. The lower one's income is, the more their political participation declines (Solt 2008).

Education is the first factor that has an effect on political participation in particular, voting. In several studies over the last five years researchers have been able to find a correlation between levels of education and their likelihood of voting (Burden 541). Burden found that the more educated one is, the higher the rate of political participation. Lower rates of education have already been linked to lower voter participation. A study done by Sunshine Hillygus found that one of the reasons education may play such a vital role in the political process involves two factors. First, extremely developed social skills that one gains not only from high school but also college curriculum is crucial. (Skills that are specifically tested by the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT); students only need to take this test if they plan on going to college). For kids who dropout of high school or do not plan to go to college, these skills may never be fully developed. The second link that Hillygus found is the development of language and civic skills. Skills developed in speech and language classes that are taught and refined in high school and college play an important role in helping to channel civic participation (Hillygus 25).

Parental Influence and Political Participation

It has long been theorized that parents have the most significant role in socializing their children to political involvement. Dalton (1980), found that during the early years of their lives, children have few, if any, sources of learning compared to those of their parents. Since children constantly rely on their parents to meet their needs, they learn to trust their parents' judgement. Party identification is shaped earlier than most other

political attitudes and has a strong influence in shaping all other political attitudes (Westholm and Niemi 1992).

Oftentimes, children will accept their parents' political ideology as their own until they gain enough knowledge to form their own political ideas and opinions. Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers (2009), found that the rise in divorce rates, blended families, and single parent households changed the effects of parental influence; showing that a child who grew up in one of these types of households is less likely to be politically active than their peers who grew up in a traditional two parent household. Children will follow their parents' lead when it comes to political habits.

A study done in Finland, by Gindgil, Wass, Valaste (2016), found that the most important factor in a child's future political participation is whether or not their parents actually vote. People who had received advice from their parents regarding the significance of voting were more likely to vote than those who did not (Wass 2007). Furthermore, parents with experience voting can help their child feel more comfortable when their time comes to vote. They can explain how to register to vote, what will happen at the polling place, and how to properly fill out a ballot (Gindegil, Wass, Valaste 2016). This will help children who are transitioning into adulthood feel more prepared their first time walking into a polling place. Gindegil, Wass, and Valaste (2016), also found that children who live in a household where both parents vote, as opposed to just one, are more likely to be politically active than their peers. Children who live in a household where both parents vote regularly were 30.1% more likely than their peers to vote regularly. Modeling positive political behavior is the most important factor in transmitting voting habits to children.

If we look closely at voter turnout, we can break voting down by race, gender, age, state, etc. Researchers have looked at the nearly every aspect of who votes and why they do it. One of the biggest factors that political scientists have found influences an individual's likelihood of voting is their level of education. Over the last five years researchers have been able to find a correlation between levels of education and a likelihood of voting. Burden (2009) found that the more educated one is, the higher the rate of political participation. Americans who value education are more likely to value the importance of voting. Verba, Schlozman, and Burns (2005) found according to Status Transmission Theory, education serves as the main transmission of political activity from generation to generation. Parents who had a good education before having their children and continue to value education after having children are more likely to produce children who are more politically active than their peers.

Sex is another factor that influences voter turnout. Children are more likely to model the behavior of the people they perceive to be most similar to themselves (Bussey and Bandura 1999). Daughters will more likely model their mother's political habits while sons will more likely follow their father's political activities, but the father/son link is less lasting than mothers to daughters (Atkeson and Rapoport 2003; Gidengil, O'Neill and Young 2010; Owen and Dennis 1988; Rapoport 1985). Females who reported talking to their fathers about politics growing up were 20 percent more likely to have an interest

in politics than females who did not grow up discussing politics with either parent (Lawless and Fox 2011). Females who feel supported by their male parent are more likely to be involved in politics, but they will tend to favor their mother's political opinions more than their father's.

Gidengil et al. (2016), looked at the Status Transmission Theory in hopes of better understanding the influence that parents have on their children's political decisions. Status Transmission Theory measures wealthier families' political involvement and the chances that this involvement will be passed on to their children. Brady et al. (2015) finds that parental socioeconomic disadvantages translate to political disadvantages. Children who are born to parents who fall into poorer families are less likely to be involved in politics than their wealthier counterparts. Gidengil et al. (2016) found that there are two mechanisms by which wealthier parents are able to influence their children in politics. First is that children who are born into wealthier families tend to be more educated and are more likely to be exposed to politics in the home. Second is that parents of higher socioeconomic status are more likely to pass their socioeconomic advantages onto their children, thus giving them political advantages. Parents who have the means to donate to campaigns, take off of work to vote, and have the time to discuss politics with their children are more likely to influence their children than those who do not have the financial means to do so.

Adults who recall having political discussions with their parents or remember seeing their parents engage in political activities are more likely to vote than those who did not (Verba, Burns, and Schlozman 2003; Verba, Schlozman, and Burns 2005). Kids who grow up in a household where political discussion is normal or even a priority will be more likely to be politically engaged even after they leave their parents household. A study by Wuttke (2016), looked at the influence of parental “neglect” on a child’s political participation later in their lives. Children who do not believe their basic needs were met during childhood are less likely to engage in political behavior. Using self-determination theory (SDT), Wuttke (2016), surmised that human action is determined by basic human needs. It is likely that adults who felt they were neglected as children and that the government did nothing to help are less compelled to be involved in any form of political activity.

“Genetics” and Political Socialization

Many political scientists have long debated the effects of nature versus nurture. Are we born predisposed to vote or does the way we grow up play more of a role? The main way that political scientists study the genetic effects on political participation is by looking at twins. Genet (2015), found that twins’ genetics play a larger role in deciding political ideology than their parents – regardless of whether they were identical or fraternal. “Almost 40 years ago, evidence from large studies of adult twins and their

relatives suggested that between 30 and 60 % of the variance in social and political attitudes could be explained by genetic influences” (Hatemi and McDermott 2012).

A study by Eaves, Eysenck and Martin (1989) found that monozygotic co-twins (identical twins) are more likely than dizygotic co- twins (fraternal) to have the same political ideology. Parent and adult child concordance showed more of a genetic transmission and personal experience rather than social learning in their home.

A study of Australian twins by Hatemi (2007) found that when vote choices were dichotomized between Labor versus Conservative, twins showed constituent genetic influence. While Hatemi et. al (2007) found that vote choice was influenced by genetics, Eaves et al. (1989) showed political partisanship was primarily influenced by environment.

Research by Cesarini, et al. looked at the impact that adoption has on the political participation of young people. They analyzed data from Swedish adoptees, their siblings, their adoptive parents, and their biological parents. Cesarini et, al. found that the largest socialization impact is from adoptees who biological mothers do not vote but whose adoptive mothers do. Adoptees whose biological mothers do not vote but whose adopted mothers do are sixteen percent more likely to vote compared to the 0.6 percent likelihood that an adoptee whose biological mother and adoptive mother vote (Cesarini, Johannesson and Oskaraaon 2014). This research helps point to the idea that children who are adopted into a family with strong political participation are more likely to engage

in political activities compared to those who are born into families with strong political participation.

Non-Traditional Households and Political Socialization

The foster care system makes up what we would consider a non-traditional family structure. The children in the system are often not related to the people in the household that they belong to. In 2017, 45 percent of children in the foster care system live in a non-relative family home, 32 percent were placed in relative foster homes, and 11 percent of children in the system live in institutions or group homes instead of a family structure (Children's Rights 2016). Because there are no studies over the effects of parental influence of children in foster care and a direct link to voting, there are some studies on the effect that having an absent parent or an incarcerated parent has on children. For the purposes of this paper, I will be using those statistics and research. A Gallup Poll found that 71 percent of children identify exactly the same political party as their parents (Lyons 2005). This poll shows that most children remain politically close to their parents. For the children who spend their lives in foster care, they do not have a stable parent to model and look at. Instead, they must try and learn about political ideas and topics likely taking social cues from multiple sources: other foster children, multiple foster homes, etc. This likely means the influence of these sources is weaker than the effects of traditional parents on biological children. This may leave them at a disadvantage that they

do not even know about. This research help to uncover a casual link between parental influence and voting behavior.

Over the years, the make-up of “traditional” households has changed drastically. Single parent households, same-sex households, and divorced households are all more common today than they used to be. The percentage of two-parent households has decreased from 87 percent in 1960 to 69 percent in 2014 ("The American Family Today" 2015). While the number of two-parent households decreasing, the divorced rate in America is decreasing. The divorce rate currently sits around 50 percent ("Marriage And Divorce" 2019). As family structures change, so does our understanding of parental political socialization.

A study by Michael Sances in 2011 found that children whose parents get divorced were less likely to vote than those who grew up in a stable two-parent household (Sances 2011). Children who grow up with divorced parents, who maintain a relationship with both parents, still struggle to develop good political habits. Despite growing up with both parents the lack of time spent with both parents has a negative impact on their political participation. Kids who grow up in the foster care system live in what would be viewed as a non-traditional family structure. Kids in foster care often do not have traditional parental role models, making it difficult for these children to develop grounded political habits.

Another family structure that affects political participation and plagues foster care kids at a higher rate than others is parental incarceration. Roughly ten percent of children in the foster care system have either one or both parents in prison as of 2013 (Lee, Porter and Comfort 2013). The effects of having a parent in prison can also have a negative influence on voting behavior. A study by Murphy and Cooper (2019), found that parental incarceration is a factor in lower school performance as well as lower voting behavior. Because a high number of children in foster care also fall into this category, their chances of frequent voting continue to decrease. Since most children in foster care fall into one or both of the groups listed above, their voting behavior will likely be lower than those who grow up in a traditional family structure.

Adoption and Political Participation

Children who are pulled from their permanent homes and put into the foster care system at an age when they can remember their previous family structure may have a harder time adjusting to their “new” families. Infant adoption is the most common in the United States, followed closely by adoption of children from the foster system. Research by Grotevant et. al, found that children who are adopted from the system are more likely to struggle adjusting to their new lives than children who are adopted into families as infants (Grotevant et al. 2000). As children try to discover their own identity, those that are pulled from their families may struggle more than those who were adopted as infants. Identity development is a life-long process. The physical and psychological presence or

absence of relevant network members determines the nature of social interactions the adolescents will have. Children who are pulled for their homes as young kids will struggle to form networks, especially those that are adopted later in their lives (Grotevant et al. 2000). Vonk, Lee, and Crolley-Simic (2010), did a study that focused on domestic and international transracial adoptions in the United States. They found that children who were adopted into families who are of a different ethnicity than them look to their parents to help them understand racial politics and dynamics in the United States. Scroggs and Heitfield (2001), found that adopted children - transracial adoptees in particular - will be socialized by their parents during their early elementary years. Adoptees look to their parents to help them understand the world, including politics, and they will often model their parents' behavior at an early age. A 2009 study found that adult Korean adoptees appreciated the effort put forth by their parents to socialize them to their own culture but felt that they fell short when it came to explaining racial politics and dynamics in the United States (McGinnis, Livingston, Ryan, and Howard 2009). Families who adopt children but do not have biological children are likely to struggle less to socialize their children to politics than those who already have biological children in their homes (Vonk and Massatti 2007). Adopted children who feel that their families are focusing more on them than their own biological children more closely follow their parents' political association than those children who may feel the need to "compete" with the biological children in the home.

CHAPTER II

THEORY

How Foster Care Affects Political Participation

Foster care sets out to improve the quality of life for children who live in very rough home situations. Unfortunately, for many children who live in the system, they do not find the safe, caring, and loving home that they so desperately need. Instead, these children have shown to have higher rates of physical, developmental, and mental health issues (Committee on Early Childhood). In the literature review, I provided evidence that given the adverse effects on those who grow up in foster care in transitioning to adulthood, I am interested in parental socialization through areas of education, income, and interracial parenting, may impact whether or not a child will grow up to vote.

Parental Influence

Positive parental influence is very important for children to develop healthy political participation. The best way to understand an adults party allegiance is to determine the political party preferred by his parents (Settle, Dawes, Fowler 2009). From the beginning of their lives, children will follow their parents' lead. A study done in Finland, by Gindgil, Wass, Valaste (2016), found that the most important factor in a child's future political participation is whether or not their parents actually vote. People

who had received advice from their parents regarding the significance of voting were more likely to vote than those who did not (Wass 2007).

Furthermore, parents with experience voting can help their child feel more comfortable when their time comes to vote. They can explain how to register to vote, what will happen at the polling place, and how to properly fill out a ballot (Gindegil, Wass, Valaste 2016). This will help children who are transitioning into adulthood feel more prepared their first time walking into a polling place. Gindegil, Wass, and Valaste (2016), also found that children who live in a household where both parents vote, as opposed to just one, are more likely to be politically active than their peers. Children who live in a household where both parents vote regularly were 30.1% more likely than their peers to vote regularly. Modeling positive political behavior is the most important factor in transmitting positive voting habits to children.

Children who live in the foster care system may experience 20 or more foster placements before they are reunited with their birth parents, adopted into a permanent family, or reach they age where they can legally leave the foster care system all together. During this time, the likelihood that they will see habitual political participation modeled is low. For the children who spend their lives in foster care, they do not have a stable parent to model. Kevin shared that he lived in more than 35 homes during his time in the system and never one time was exposed to anything political.¹ Knowing that positive

¹ Name changed to provide confidentiality to the participant.

political participation is the most important influencing factor in political status transmission it is unlikely that children in the foster care system will become politically active due to a lack of positive parental political exposure.

Parental Stability

Parents play a vital role in the development of a child. They help them learn right from wrong, understanding the importance of education and work ethic, and helping them to establish healthy political habits. What happens when the parents who are supposed to teach children all of these lessons are not permanent? Children who grow up in safe and stable homes are more likely to have better long- and short-term adjustment skills.

Children are more likely to have trusting relationships with caregivers who are consistent and nurturing, leading to a number of positive development outcomes (Harden 2004).

Using Harden's (2004) research it is safe to assume that children who are reared in stable homes will be more likely to have positive political participation.

If children are raised in safe and stable homes, then it is safe to assume they will develop healthy political participation then those who grow up in multiple homes with multiple parents are more likely to develop negative political participation. Children who live in the foster care system struggle to form lasting relationships (Harden 2004). This makes it very difficult for foster parents to have any sort of positive political impact on

the children in their care. This is especially true for adolescences. Adolescences need stability coupled with enough freedom to make them feel balanced. If children do not get this stability, they are more likely to develop emotional and mental problems (Harden 2004). Any impact that could be made by foster parents is lessened by the lack of stability provided by the foster care system.

Parental Education and Socioeconomic Status

Besides modeling positive political participation, Flanagan and Levin (2010), found that parental education level may be one of the strongest predictors of strong political participation even when other socioeconomic factors are considered. Using the US Citizens Participatory Study, Schlozman, Verba, and Brady (2012) found a strong association between parental education level and their children's participation and understanding of political affairs. If we look at the education of foster parents across the country, as of 2015 we find that 70 percent of the foster parent population have an education beyond high school ("Who Are Foster Parents"2020). The 2017, US Census Bureau found that 54 percent of the United State population had obtained more than a high school education (Bureau 2017). Foster parents, on average, are more likely to have a higher education than an average American. This means, according to research by Schlozman, Verba, and Brady (2010) and Flanagan and Levin (2010), that children in the foster care system should be more politically exposed than the average American child. However, on average, most foster children will remain in the system for close to two years. During this time, they could live in up to 6 homes (Foster Care- Children's Rights 2020). This means that the influence that parental education could have had on these children is unlikely to happen.

Parental socioeconomic status is also very important when looking at transmission of political participation habits between parent and child. Verba, Schlozman, and Burns

(2003; 2005), found that children from socioeconomic advantaged backgrounds are more likely to participate politically than those who come from middle- or low-income homes. They theorize that parents who are wealthier will likely pass on their socioeconomic background to their children; making their children want to vote more to maintain their current status. Foster parents are more likely to have a lower income than the average population with children. Foster parents, on average, make about \$56,364 yearly compared to the \$74,301 made by the median household with children. 1/4th of foster homes fall on or just below the poverty line. Kinship foster homes often make up the lower end of the scale. ("Who Are Foster Parents 2020). Since foster parents fall into a lower income scale than the average family this could affect whether or not their foster children participate politically.

How to Reconcile Parental Education and Income Levels

Knowing that most foster parents have a higher level of income than the average American but often live in an income bracket that is lower than their peers makes it difficult to understand how foster care truly affects political participation. Foster care is extremely unpredictable for all involved. Social workers must find acceptable homes, foster parents must be willing to go through training and the risk that is involved with taking in a foster child, and then the children must deal with the constant uncertainty of their living situation. Unfortunately, children who are placed into foster homes often struggle to feel like they are a part of the family. Most of them realize that their

placement is not permanent, so they do not connect emotionally with their placement families.

I believe that this lack of permanent physical home and emotional connection with a foster family outweighs both the education and income levels effect on a foster child. Understanding that stability, in my opinion, plays a key role in the outcomes of the political participation I think that denying the importance of both parental education and income levels would be irresponsible. Foster children have the experience of living in a variety of households. Some may be able to provide for their every need while others may be struggling to get by. Others may have two parents that have college degrees while others may have two parents who did not finish high school. This sets them up to see a completely different view of the world than someone who grew up in the same household for their entire life. Both parental education and income play a vital role in the outcome of a child's political participation, one is not more important than the other, but within the foster care system they may differ greatly amongst homes.

Interracial Influence

As discussed in the literature review, interracial family dynamics can have an effect on the way that children grow up politically. In 2017, 39% on children in the foster care system were white compared to the 77% of white parents (Zill 2020). This means that most children in the system will be placed with a parent who does not look like them. In American politics today, many of the issues that voters will face concern race. Police

brutality, welfare programs, and discrimination are all race based issues that plague today's political system (Hochschild 2020). If foster children grow-up in a household where their parents do not look like them or care about the issues that face those that do look like them, they may avoid politics altogether.

Children who grow up in interracial homes often feel alienated from their own culture. Everyone has political issues that concern them. Unfortunately, not every race is concerned about the same issues. This makes it difficult for families to explain racial politics to their foster children. This lack of understanding of racial politics could lead foster children to have a negative view of politics.

Hypothesis

Given the strong ties between parental socialization and a child's propensity to be politically active it makes sense to examine a group with differing levels of parental stability. Individuals who grew up and aged out of foster care are more likely to have had a less stable parental situation than either those who never were in foster care or those who were adopted out of foster care. Does this lack of parental stability create a situation with respect to politics is limited? Further, what aspect of parental socialization or lack thereof, stable parental environment, education, income, interracial parenting, are more likely to negatively impact a child's political involvement?

Hypothesis 1: Adults who grew up and aged out of the foster care system are less likely than those who did not live in the system or were adopted out of the system to be politically active

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

To test this hypothesis, I need to survey people who have lived in the foster care system. However, this poses several challenges. First, the confidential nature that children in foster care live under, second, the different laws regarding foster care in each individual state- currently 21 states allow children to stay in the foster care system until they are twenty-one years of age- the remaining 29 states consider them aged out at eighteen (Wiltz 2019). Another deterring factor is that there is no specific way to find children who grew up in the foster care system. So, in order to test my hypothesis, I will be taking a quantitative approach that will hopefully help to control for the three issues presented above. I will further discuss the reason that I chose this specific method, its advantages and disadvantages, as well as, the exact way that I plan to measure my results and the method that I plan to use to gather the necessary data.

There are advantages and disadvantages to using a strictly quantitative method to test this hypothesis. The advantages to using a quantitative study for a hypothesis like the one that I have presented is: getting the opportunity to ask enough questions to cover a wide scope of people: age range, race, time in the foster care system, number of houses that they lived in, etc. I can also use a large-N study that will help me find patterns amongst the data. Using a quantitative study will help me sort through the large number surveys that I will have without sacrificing reliability.

The disadvantages of using only a quantitative study is the possibility of generalizing the results of the survey. This survey interpretation could create both reliability and validity issues. Since individuals interpret feelings differently this could lead to an inconsistency amongst participants. If each individual taking to survey understands the question differently than the survey could be considered invalid. The consequences of this could be research bias. When examining the data, I or another researcher, could understand the results to have a different meaning than those who were taking the survey felt. This could lead to giving the wrong results for the research done.

The way that I have chosen to test this hypothesis is to do a survey. I will first conduct a survey on adults who grew up in the foster care system. The survey will allow me to ask questions that are necessary to the research. Since foster care has a very negative connotation talking to people who actually grew up in the system and finding out the effects that they feel it has had on them personally will hopefully help me answer my hypothesis. In order to study my hypothesis, I will have to find the proper group to field my survey. For this particular hypothesis I will be using adults, who lived in the foster care system, before eventually aging out. In order to truly understand the effects that foster care had on the political participation of these participants I will administer a similar survey to adults who did not live the foster care system.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable that I will be looking at is political participation. I will use five different variables to measure political participation. Each variable will be coded with either a 0 or 1. If a respondent answers yes on the survey than they will get a 1. If they answer no on the survey, then they will be coded as a 0. I will define political participation as being registered to vote, voting in the last election², volunteering on a campaign, attending a rally, and donating money to a campaign. I will collect my data from a survey that I will be administering.

The first dependent variable that I will measure is a person's voter registration status. If a participant is registered to vote, regardless of whether or not they have actually exercised their right to vote, they will be coded as a 1. If they have not registered to vote or do not know if they are registered, then they will get a 0. Brady et. al (1995), uses this as a measure in their research "Beyond SES: A Resource Model of Political Participation". For this variable I will run a logit regression.

The second dependent variable that I will measure is actual voter participation. If the participant has voted in any election in the last election cycle, see footnote 2, then they will be coded as a 1. If they have not voted or do not know if they voted in the last election than they going to be coded as 0. Brady et.al (1995), use this measure in their

² This can include both federal, state, or local election

“Beyond SES: A Resource Model of Political Participation” paper. Making it a reasonable DV for my study. For this variable I will run a logit regression.

The third dependent variable that I will be measuring is whether or not the participant has ever volunteered on a political campaign. Rosenstone and Hansen (2003), found that while 57 percent of Americans cast a ballot in an election, only 4 percent actually volunteered on a political campaign. If a participant has ever volunteered on a campaign then they will be coded as a 1, if they have not or they do not know for sure if they have then they will be coded as 0. For this variable I will run a logit regression.

The fourth dependent variable is attendance at a political rally. During the 2016 Presidential election, 20 percent of Americans reported attending a political rally (Bowden 2018). While campaign rally attendance is on the upswing, attendance is still not very high. If a participant has ever attended a political rally, then they will be coded as a 1. Participants who answered no or I do not know will be coded as a 0. For this variable I will use a logit regression.

The fifth dependent variable that I will be looking at is monetary campaign contributions. If a participant has ever donated money to a campaign, no matter the amount, then they will be coded as a 1. If they have not donated money or do not know, then they will be coded as a 0. Rosenstone and Hansen (2003), found that on average, ten percent of Americans were willing to donate money to a political campaign. I will not ask for the amount that a participant has donated but rather I will focus strictly on if the

donation occurred. For this reason, I will run a logit regression. While three answer options will be available, yes, no, and don't know, those that answer "don't know" will be left out of the data.

Since each of the dependent variables is dichotomous, I will run a series of logit models. While each of the dependent variable had three answer options anyone who answered that they did not know will be coded as a no. More than likely, if a participant did not know if they were registered to vote, actively voting, donating to a campaign, or volunteering on a campaign they would know. For this reason, they will just be included with the nos.

Independent Variable

The independent variable that I am looking at is whether a participant aged out of the foster care system or not. All participants will be of adult age. Meaning that they are no longer apart of the foster care system. They either aged out at the age of 18 or 21, depending on the state, or were adopted before they turned 18. Those who were adopted out of the foster care system will be coded as a 0. This is regardless of the age that they are adopted out of the system. Those who were not adopted and instead aged out of the system, will be coded as a 1.

The second independent variable that will be used for this research is the number of foster homes that a participant lived in.³ If a participant did not know how many homes, they lived in during their time in the system they were coded as a missing variable represented with a period. Participants were given the option between 1 and 20 homes. Many of the participants who took the survey did not know how many homes they had lived in.

Control Variables

When looking at my control variables there are several problems that I could run into. Most of them were mentioned at the beginning of this section. However, one that I did not discuss is the constant changing nature of foster care. Most children do not stay in the same household for very long, thirteen months on average. This does not take into account children who struggle with certain physical, mental, or emotional disabilities that cause them to be moved more often (Texas Family Initiative 2018). Because of this, when participants take the survey, I will ask them to think of the foster home that they spent the most time in or felt the closest with.

The first variable that I will controlling for is whether or not the foster or biological parents in the home voted. Jennings (2004), shows that “both observational learning and direct reinforcement, children should tend to absorb the political enthusiasm or apathy of their parents.” Since children observe their parents, knowing if their foster parents voted is important. If a participant says that they believe their foster parent did

³ See survey for options of number of homes

vote, then they will be coded as a 1. If they did not vote or the participant did not know if they voted, then they will be coded as a 0.

The second control variable that I will control for is the Party ID of the foster or biological parents. Achen (2002), shows that there is a strong positive finding between party identification of child and parent. Because the transmission of party identification from parent to child knowing a foster or biological parents party identification is important. If a participant was able to interpret their foster parents party ID and comparing those to the participant is important. I will code Democrat as 1, Independent as 2, and Republican as 3 and no party or unsure as was coded as a missing variable.

Third, I will control for the education of the foster or biological parents of participants. Gidengil, Wass, and Valaste (2016), show a correlation between parental education and a child's political participation. The more educated one's parents are the more likely a child is to be involved in politics. Understanding the importance of education in their homes is important. If their foster or biological parent has only a high school education is 1, some college is 2, 4-year college degree is 3, graduate degree/certificate is 4. Those who were unsure of the highest level of education obtained by one of their parents will be coded as a missing variable.

The fourth control variable I will be using is the income of foster or biological parents.⁴ There is no income requirement to become a foster parent. Each state can set their own requirements, mostly that they can pay their own bills and provide basic care, but there is not a set income bracket ("What Are The Requirements To Be A Foster

⁴ This will include the government subsidies that they get for being foster parents.

Parent?" 2019). They will be broken down by income bracket. \$20,000 or less will be coded as 1. \$20,000 to \$34,999 will be 2, \$35,000 to \$49,999 will be coded as 3, \$50,000 to \$74,999 will be coded as a 4, \$75,000 to \$99,999 will be coded as 5, and over \$100,000 will be coded as a 6, and participants who were unsure of their parents level of income will be coded as a missing variable.

The fifth control variable that I will be looking at is the ethnicity of the foster or biological parents. As mentioned in the literature review, children who are raised by parents of a different ethnicity than themselves, are more likely to struggle to assimilate to politics. This is because their parents adopt a "colorblind" approach to child rearing. This can change their view of politics. For this variable foster or biological parents who are white will be coded as a 1. Parents who were any other race were coded as a 0.

Outside of controlling for foster parents I will also control directly for influences of the participants. We currently know that age, gender, political knowledge and the party ID of a participant all influence whether or not they will vote. I will control for all of these to ensure that I am truly measuring the effects of foster care and not these other variables.

The first control variable relating directly to the participants is the age of the participants. It is firmly known that older people are more interested in politics (Neundorf 2013). A study done by Prior (2019), showed that the levels of interest in politics increase as one age. A well-established older person is more likely to be interested and involved than a young, 18-year-old who is just entering into the political arena. With age playing such a role I will control for the age of the participant at the time of the survey. If they are

between 18-24 years of age, they will be a 1. If they are between 25-30 years of age, then they will be a 2. If they are 31-35 years of age, then they will be a 3. Between 36-44 years of age then they will be a 4. 45+ years of age will be a 5 and Prefer not to answer will be a missing variable.

The second control variable that I am looking at is gender. Women typically express less interest in politics than their male counterparts (Neundorf 2013). Many believe that this is because that politics is still a man's world, so it is difficult for women to feel interested in politics (Gidengil et al. 2006). Because of this I will code men as 0 women as 1. While it is more common now for people to identify as a different gender than the sex that was assigned to them at birth for this research that does not play a role. Therefore, I will not be coding for that.

The third control that I will be looking at is the income of the participant. Wealthy, economically comfortable people with higher status jobs are statistically more interested in politics (Prior 2019). As I discussed in my literature review children who leave the foster care system and leave as adults are more likely to be in the lower income bracket. Knowing this I will ask about the current income of the participants. They will be coded as follows Less than \$25,000 will be a 1. \$25,000 - \$50,000 will be a 2. \$50,000 - \$100,000 will be a 3. \$100,000 - \$200,000 will be a 4. More than \$200,000 will be coded as a 5. Prefer not to say will be a as missing variable.

The fourth participant variable that I will control for is party ID. Wolak (2009), shows that the more strongly a person identifies with a political party, the more likely they are to be involved in politics. I have not found significant findings showing that one political party is more likely to vote than another.

So, understanding how attached to a political party a participant is important. Strong Democrat or moderate Democrat will be a 1. Moderate Republican or strong Republican will be 2. Those who identify as independent or a different party all together will be a 3. If a participant does not know with what party, they most identify with then they will be coded as a missing variable. While the US offers a myriad of political parties most will identify under one of the two major parties, Republican or Democrat, so all other parties will fall under other.

The last control variable that I will be using related to the participant is political knowledge. To measure this variable, I asked four basic political questions.⁵ For this variable I created a 0-4 scale. Each question asked was a “point”. Each question a participant answered correctly gave them a point on the scale. For this variable I added tabulated all 4 questions together to create a total. The more questions a participant got correct the higher their score on this variable. No questions will be thrown out. Regardless of whether the participant got it correct or not it will count towards their score.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for this particular study will be conducted on the individual level. Looking specifically at individuals who previously lived in the foster care before aging out of the system. I will sample people who lived in the system and were adopted out. Based on the length of time they spent in foster care and the age in which they were adopted from the system.

⁵ See survey questions 28-31

Since foster care focuses on each individual child, even if you put a group of siblings in the system together, the outcome for each child is different. Each child has their own individual story, meaning that foster care effects each child in a different way. Some children live in abusive homes and others live in foster homes that love them and help them grow. This unit of analysis will help to account for these differences and avoid making assumptions. Given the variances between each child's story doing an analysis on the individual level is the most appropriate. My hypothesis seeks to find the impact that foster care has had on each individual person's political involvement. Asking questions to each individual and learning from their personal stories will give me the chance to find the most accurate answers to my hypothesis.

Methodology

In order to test my hypothesis, I will be using a quantitative approach with statistical first interference, but I am using a qualitative approach to gather and collect data. ⁶ I will create a survey that will ask about the experience of each person who grew up in the system and how growing up in the foster care system effects their political participation. These questions will not ask about any form of abuse or the home that they were removed from. Instead it will get at the heart of my research question. My questions

⁶ See attached survey

will ask about the time that they spent in foster care, how many homes they lived in, and the political participation of their most lived in foster home.

I administered my survey using closed support groups on Facebook. These groups provide a place for former foster children to get support and discuss the different environments they lived in and how this affected them later in life. I joined group's that are open up to people all over the country. I joined four Facebook groups but only posted in three of them to run my survey. I chose not to administer the survey in the last group because it was specifically for children who had suffered physical and sexual abuse while in the system. I did not feel comfortable intruding on their privacy for this experiment. I was unaware that this was the way that the group was set-up until I was added.

I made a post on each Facebook page asking people to take my survey. The survey was completely anonymous, so the participants were completely protected. The post explained what I am doing and why this study is important and how much them taking this survey could possibly help improve the quality of life of children currently living in the foster care program. I will leave the survey open for a month. Unfortunately, only 13 people completed the survey.

The comparison group that I used were not in the foster care system. To measure this group, I made a Facebook post on in a Facebook group for fans of a popular true crime podcast, asking people to take the survey. The survey was shared more than 50 times and spread all of the country, giving me a good variety of participants. These

participants took the same survey as those in the foster care system, slightly modified to ask about their biological parents, but with the same questions regarding political participation. 140 people over all took this part of the survey.

Obviously, the number of people who took the survey greatly varies from those who grew up in the foster care system and those who did not. A general comparison of the overall United State population and those who live in foster care is a similar to the population breakdown of the survey. In 2018, the population of the United States was 327.3 million compared to the 443,000 children that live in the foster care system ("Census Bureau - Google Search" 2020). This makes the percentage of children in the foster care system about 0.6% of the whole population. This means that the ratio of former foster care children to people who did not grow up in the foster care system is well represented in the sample.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Table 1 shows the relationship between growing up in the foster care system and the likelihood of being politically active. For this, I ran an ordered logit regression. I chose this type of regression because the dependent variable is ordered and categorical, over continuous. I also ran this as a negative binomial count model since the dependent variable is a sum of participation and obtained the same substantive results. I summered each individual measures of participation to create one dependent variable for an ordered logit analysis. My dependent variables for this regression are the participants level of political participation. My independent variable is whether or not a participant was raised in and aged out of foster care. My control variables for this regression were gender, race, age, political party ID, education level, income level, and political knowledge.

As shown, nothing of significance at the .05 level for my independent variables. There are a number of reasons that this was the outcome of this study. First, the number of participants who took the survey who grew up and aged out of the foster care system was only 13. This means that my sample size was not large enough to get an accurate representation of this population. Second, many of the participants could not fill in any information about a single set of foster parents. Many of them left comments on the

Facebook post letting me know that they never had a foster parent mention anything about politics to them that they could remember.

Knowing that many participants could not recall their foster parents ever mentioning anything politically related to them could possibly show that children who grow up in the foster care were less likely than their peers to be exposed to politics by their foster parents. Seminal works in politics, see literature review, show us that people who recall discussing politics with their families are more likely to be politically active than those who do not. This could show that foster children may be at a disadvantage when it comes to this type of parental socialization.

Table 2 shows the relationship between the number of homes a person lives in and the likelihood that they will be politically active. To test these variables, I re-ran the same model, but with the number of homes as the key independent variable. The dependent variable for this regression is the political participation of each participant. The independent variable is the number of homes that a participant lived in. This means biological homes and foster homes. The control variables are the same as in Table1, race, gender, age, political party ID, education level, income level, and political knowledge.

The results in Table 2 show that there is no significant relationship between these variables at the 0.5 level. Like presented above, this could be caused for a number of reasons. The most likely cause is because the sample size was just too small to accurately represent this population

The average number of homes lived in by a participant was between 2-5. This means that the level of stability for these participants is quite low. This could make it difficult for children to have any sort of meaningful political conversations with a parent.

Both Table 1 and Table 2 share the same control variables. Age, gender, race, party ID, education, income, and political knowledge. As shown in both tables gender, race, and political knowledge are all significant at the .01 level. These controls variables average out the way that we would expect. It is well known that white males are more politically active than females and racial minorities. As for the political knowledge control, individuals who were found to be politically active were more likely to answer the political knowledge questions correctly than those who were not found to be politically knowledgeable.

Table 1: Relationship Between Foster Care and Political Participation |

Participation	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P> z .	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Foster Child	-0.157	1.15	-0.14	0.891	-2.42	2.10
Parent Socialization	-0.052	0.105	-0.50	0.618	-0.260	0.154
Gender	-1.15	0.530	-2.18	0.029*	-2.19	-0.118
Age	0.221	0.151	1.46	0.144	-0.075	0.518
Race	1.31	0.610	2.15	0.031*	0.116	2.50
Party ID	-0.125	0.187	-0.67	0.503	-0.494	0.242
Education	0.113	0.203	0.56	0.576	-0.285	0.513
Income	-0.110	0.136	-0.81	0.418	-0.377	0.156
Political Knowledge	0.944	0.261	3.62	0.000*	0.433	1.45
τ_1	0.763	1.64			-3.98	2.45
τ_2	0.332	1.62			-2.84	3.51
τ_3	1.29	1.62			-1.88	4.47
τ_4	4.39	1.68			1.09	7.69
τ_5	4.86	1.68			1.55	8.17
τ_6	5.91	1.71			2.54	9.28
N 153			*p<0.1			
R-Squared 0.1007						

Table 2: Relationship Between Number of Homes and Political Participation |

Participation	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P> z .	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Number of Homes	0.094	0.35	0.26	0.792	-0.609	0.798
Parental Socialization	-0.044	0.107	-0.41	0.680	-0.254	0.165
Gender	-1.17	0.529	-2.22.	0.027*	-2.21	-0.136
Age	0.220	0.151	1.46	0.146	- 0.076	0.516
Race	1.30	0.613	2.13	0.033*	0.105	2.509
Party ID	-0.139	0.189	-0.74	0.461	-0.511	0.231
Education	0.114	0.203	0.56	0.575	-0.284	0.513
Income	-0.110	0.136	-0.81	0.418	-0.377	0.156
Political Knowledge	0.934	0.934	3.59	0.000*	0.424	1.44
τ_1	-0.758	1.64			-3.97	2.45
τ_2	0.337	1.61			-2.83	3.51
τ_3	1.297	1.62			-1.88	4.47
τ_4	4.39	1.68			1.10	1.76
τ_5	4.867	1.68			1.56	8.17
τ_6	5.92	1.71			2.55	9.28
N 153		*p<0.1				
R-Squared 0.1008						

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Understanding the connection between growing up and aging out of foster and the effects that it plays on those individual political participation is important. Previous political scholars have presented evidence that parents socialize their children to political activity. In this study, I set out to understand what happens to children who do not live with a consistent set of parents, specifically, children who grew up and aged out of the foster care system. By creating a survey that asked specific questions about each individual experience with a specific set of foster parents and their current political activity I hoped to gain insight into this currently unrecognized phenomenon.

Unfortunately, my research was found to be inconclusive. The sample size of people who actually grew up and aged out of the foster care system was only 13. Coupled with the fact that most of the foster participants did not know any political or demographic information of their longest standing foster home. This makes it impossible to know, from this study, what role a lack of stability created by the foster care system has on an individual's future political activity. While the findings were not what I had hoped this is an experiment I could perform in the future in hopes of finding significance.

When continuing this research in the future the first step to ensuring a successful project would be to find an alternative method to sampling this population. For most of these adults, the foster care system, was not a positive experience. Instead, it left them with a lack of trust in the people around them.

Making it difficult to persuade them to participate in research like what I proposed. Researchers will need to take the time, possibly years, to cultivate positive relationships with these individuals before attempting to administer a survey of this nature. I learned from my time leading this research that many of these people do not trust outsiders; meaning people who did not grow up in the system as well. Since I was raised in a solid two parent household it made it difficult for them to relate to me and want to share their experiences, even in confidence. This problem contributed to my small sample size and thus the lack of findings for this project.

Secondly, 7 out of 10 American adults use Facebook daily. That is roughly 69% of the American population (Gramlick 2019). However, I found that this specific population, adults who grew up in the foster care system, do not like to participate in surveys via this platform. Most of the participants in these Facebook groups prefer to use these groups to share the trauma that they experienced during their time in the system or ask advice on how to move on from their past. Many of them were upset about having their spaced invaded for the purpose of research. I am uncertain of the best way to go

about administering a survey to this population to reach a greater chunk of this population, but Facebook will likely not yield positive results.

Despite a lack of findings, in my opinion, this research can still have serious implications for the future of political science research if conducted again obtaining a larger sample size. Foster children only make up 0.6% of the United States population (Children's Rights 2016) but they are likely one of the most understudied populations in the country. We know statistics on their high school graduation rates, possible incarceration rates, and the likelihood that they will live in poverty; but we lack knowledge on other important factors that influence their lives after the exit the foster care system. If researchers could study this population and begin to gain a true understanding of the importance of parental socialization of future political participation, then there is a higher likelihood that lawmakers could have a positive impact on the foster care system as a whole.

As political science researchers I believe that one of the most important population that we can study are individuals who grew up in the foster care system. These individuals have experience with families of all education and income levels, as well as, race. This means that they may leave the system with a greater understanding of how the world around them treats different people but may also leave them confused on how to make themselves successful. They could give us a true insight into not only parental influence on political participation but specifically on education and income as well.

One week a child may live with a family who has two doctors in it and lives well above the poverty line. This family may value both education and income; showing this child that these two things are important. However, in the next week they may live in a home where neither parent finished high school and needs food stamps to survive in their everyday life. This could show the child that neither a higher education nor a higher income level is obtainable. This may mean that this person does not know what their best choice for themselves is. This can give us a greater understanding of how parents pass on both education and income traits to their offspring.

Elected officials understand that an election could come down to just one vote. If we begin to show them that almost an entire population of Americans is not participating in the political system because of their experience within the foster care system, there is a higher likelihood that they will work to better the system. Research similar to what I have conducted here could have that type of impact.

If a research is able to build a positive relationship with the participants and reach a larger group, then they will likely be able to collect more information and use it to benefit others who are currently living in the foster care system.

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